

AstraZeneca Vaccine

KEY FACTS:

- The AstraZeneca vaccine was first approved for use by Health Canada on February 26, 2021.
- There are reports in Europe of a blood clot condition (Vaccine-Induced Prothrombotic Immune Thrombocytopenia, or VIPIT) following the administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine.
 - The reported cases of VIPIT were mainly in women under the age of 55, possibly because this was the age group who received this vaccine.
 - VIPIT seems to appear about 4 to 20 days after immunization.
 - No cause or health conditions have been identified yet that result in a higher chance of developing blood clots after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- On March 29, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommended that use of the AstraZeneca vaccine should not be used in individuals under the age of 55 until more investigation into incidents of VIPIT could be done.
- As of March 29, in Alberta, approximately 57,000 individuals 55 years of age and older have had the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine. There have been no reports of VIPIT in Alberta or the rest of Canada.
 - As of March 29, only three adverse events (soreness at the site of injection or a slight fever) were reported from the administration of the COVISHIELD vaccine.
- The scientific evidence is currently being reviewed and monitored and health officials will adjust recommendations as needed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

What are the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine?

- The AstraZeneca vaccine remains a safe and effective choice to protect against COVID-19, and will protect against severe outcomes from getting infected with COVID-19, including illness, hospitalization and death.
- In someone age 55 – 59 who is diagnosed with COVID-19, the risks of hospitalization for COVID-19 treatment are approximately 1,500 times greater than the risk of VIPIT, and the risk of death from COVID is approximately 125 times greater.
- Albertans between the ages of 55 and 64 without high risk health conditions would otherwise have to wait until approximately early May to be eligible to receive the protection of a vaccine, so AstraZeneca is being offered to this group as a way of providing earlier protection from COVID-19 risks.
- The scientific evidence is currently being reviewed, and health officials will consider expanding access once clear and compelling evidence is reviewed and accepted.

Why is the AstraZeneca vaccine only being used for individuals 55 years and older?

- People over the age of 55 have a higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19, and so should seek protection from a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.
 - The risks of hospitalization for COVID-19 in someone age 55 are approximately 1,500 times greater than the risk of VIPIT.
- For those under 55, more investigation is being done to understand more about risks of VIPIT before offering it again in order to ensure full informed consent.
- The AstraZeneca vaccine remains a safe and effective choice to protect against COVID-19, and will protect against severe outcomes of COVID-19 infection, including illness, hospitalization and death.

Who is at risk of getting blood clots after getting the AstraZeneca vaccine?

- It is not clear what risk factors may lead to this outcome, which is why health officials are pausing the administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine right now: to determine if there are any health conditions that result in a higher chance of developing blood clots after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- Based on current evidence, it has been reported most often in women under the age of 55, but this could be due to that group being more likely to have received this vaccine. It has also been reported in men.
- The currently reported frequency of this syndrome ranges from 1/25,000 doses in Norway to 1/600,000 doses in the UK.
- VIPT seems to appear about 4 to 20 days after immunization.

Why was the AstraZeneca vaccine not offered to adults over the age of 65 at first, and now it is?

- We are continuing to adjust our approach based on the latest evidence. NACI made their initial recommendation when data about the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in adults aged 65 and over was unavailable, and it was not clear how effective the vaccine was in this age group.
- Once data showed it was safe and effective for adults aged 65 and older, NACI recommended it for use in that age group.

What are the symptoms of VIPIT to watch for?

- If you experience any of these symptoms, please seek medical attention as soon as possible:
 - severe headache that does not go away
 - Seizure
 - difficulty moving part(s) of the body
 - new blurry vision that does not go away
 - difficulty speaking
 - shortness of breath
 - chest pain
 - severe abdominal pain
 - new severe swelling, pain, or colour change of an arm or a leg.

Safety data on the COVID-19 vaccines in use in Canada

- Health Canada publishes information about each authorized vaccine, posted on the Health Canada website at <https://covid-vaccine.canada.ca/>.
- Health Canada also publishes information and counts of all Adverse Events Following Immunizations (AEFI) at <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccine-safety/>.

REMINDER:

Common/expected reactions following vaccines

- Redness, warmth, swelling, bruising, itching, or feeling sore around vaccine site
- Feeling tired
- Headache
- Fever or chills
- Body aches or sore joints
- Swollen lymph nodes

These tend to be mild, can occur in the first 48 hours, and go away in a few days.

See [COVID-19 Vaccine Fact Sheet](#) for additional information.

Please call Health Link or your health practitioner if there are events outside the expected reactions.